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Liberia*

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I. Background information on Liberia

A. Geography

1. Liberia is situated on the west coast of Africa north of the equator, with Guinea on the north, Sierra Leone on the west, Côte d'Ivoire on the east and the Atlantic Ocean on the south. It covers an area of 111,379 square kilometres with a land mass of 96,370 square kilometres. Waters cover 15,050 square kilometres. Liberia has a coast line of 579 kilometres. Facing the Atlantic Ocean, the coastline is characterized by lagoons, mangrove swamps, river-deposited sandbars and inland grassy plateau which support limited agriculture. The terrain is mostly flat to rolling with the lowest point, the Atlantic Ocean at 0 m and the highest point Mount Wuteve in Lofa County at 1,380 m. There are several mountain ranges in Liberia

2. Liberia has tropical rain forest vegetation characterized predominantly by leguminous trees and a smaller amount of timber trees. These include commercial species of niagon, Tetra, Abura, Ekki, Framire, Iroko, Limbali, Kusia, etc. which are major sources of revenues. Liberia currently has 40% of all of the West African tropical forests. The Country's main resources are iron ore, timber, diamonds and gold. Agriculture accounts for a small portion of exports as the country relies on subsistence farming. There are major problems of food insecurity. Currently Liberia imports 60% of its food.

B. Climate

3. There are two seasons in Liberia, rainy and dry. The raining season generally runs from May to October with the dry season from November to April. There are intermittent periods of mild rains or mild dries. Generally the temperature is tropical, humid and dry with hot days and cool to cold nights. Recently, there have been periodic shifts in seasons due to effects of climate change. These have affected agricultural activities with farmers starting farming seasons later than usual due to longer periods of dries in some parts of Liberia.

C. Ethnic and linguistic groups

4. The official language in Liberia is English. There are also sixteen major linguistic/ethnic groups namely: Bassa, Belle, Dahn (Gio), Dei, Gbandi, Gola, Grebo, Kissi, Kpelle, Krahn, Krao (Kru), Lorma, Mandingo, Mahn (Mano) Mende and Vai. Most Liberians speak one or more of these languages or some form of pidgin Liberian English.

II. Demographic characteristics

5. The current population of Liberia is 3.5 million with an annual growth rate of 2.1%. (2008 Population and Housing Census). Women make 49.4% or nearly half of the population. The male to female ratio is 102.3.

A. Gender profile by sector

6. The current gender profile by sector in Liberia shows an overall increase though figures for women remain low in most sectors. Women rank highest in informal trade at 80% with agriculture at 60%. The stipendiary magistrates rank lowest followed by the armed forces of Liberia 0.7% and 3.8% respectively.

B. Gender profile chart

7. The following tables profile women participation in key sectors by gender as at the time of writing this report.

Liberia gender profile by sector

Economy	*Women*	*Men*
Agriculture	60%	40%
Employment in non-agriculture sector	36%	64%
Formal	24%	86%

Legal and judiciary

Legal and Judiciary	*Women*	*Men*
Supreme Court	40%	60%
Circuit Court Judges	15%	85%
Stipendiary/Associate Magistrates	0.7%	99.3%
Liberia National Police	17.5%	82.5%
Armed Forces of Liberia	3.8%	96.2%
Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization	30%	70%
Bureau of Correction and Rehabilitation	14.6%	85.4%

Political participation	*Women*	*Men*
Legislature	12.7%	87.3%
Executive (Cabinet Ministers)	30%	70%

C. Age structure

8. Liberia has a youthful population with over half of the population (55.6%) below the age of 20. 46.8% of this number are children under 15 years while 14.4% are children below age 5. Children 0-9 make up an estimated 66.5% of the total child population. Child dependency is 94% and old age dependency 6.9% making the total dependency 100.9%. This means for every 100 adults of working age, there are about 100.9 persons to be provided for economically and socially.

9. To reduce the high growth rate, Government has put in place several interventions. Family planning services are readily available nationally and the

government has instituted free primary education and provided scholarships to reduce population growth rate and increase access to education. The government has also provided agricultural aid such as seeds and tools to farmers to increase agricultural yields and has embarked on a robust job creation scheme through the establishment of agro and mining concessions.

D. Population growth and distribution

10. Information on Population dynamics have not changed since the last reporting period. A national census is held every ten years and the next is expected in 2016. However, the growth rate is induced by factors of high fertility of 5.2% nationally, large population of women of reproductive age, low contraceptive usage and practices of polygamy. The average household size is 5.2.

E. Rural to urban migration

11. Rural to Urban migration continued to increase during the last ten years due to poor opportunities for livelihood in the rural areas and search for employment and better opportunities in the urban. This high population growth in urban areas increases poverty, criminal activities, slum and decadence. It also undermines agricultural productivity and food security.

12. Concomitant to this is high urban unemployment which creates security threats. Recent attempts to reverse this trend by creating jobs in the rural areas through concessions has not yielded meaningful results due to new problems of land use and community rights.

III. Political and legal system

13. Recorded Liberian political history dates back to 1822 when a group of emancipated black American slaves financed by the American Colonization Society (ACS) arrived on the Liberian shores seeking a place of refuge and habitat. In 1847, Liberia declared its independence with a new constitution and national symbols. In 1848 the Liberian Constitution was ratified and the first elections were held in the new republic.

A. System of government

14. Liberia has a republican form of government with three independent branches: the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary. Liberia is a unitary state with a multi-party system. The Liberian constitution states that "all Power is inherent in the people and all governments exists for their benefit" (art 1, Lib const.) The President is head of state. Executive power is exercised by the President. Legislative power is vested in the two chambers of the Legislature, the House and Senate. Judicial powers rests with the judiciary. The three branches of government are co-equal yet separate and distinct.

15. Administratively, the country is divided into 15 political sub-divisions known as counties. The counties are headed by superintendents who are direct

representatives of the President. These counties are sub-divided into administrative districts headed by district commissioners who assist the superintendents. Districts commissioners, paramount, town and clan chiefs are descending lines of authorities. Cities are headed by city mayors while townships are headed by townships commissioners. The structure is municipal.

B. Functions of the Government

16. The Legislature makes the laws, the Judiciary interprets the law and the Executive executes the law. The Legislative branch of government is bi-cameral with a House of Representative and the Senate. The House is headed by a Speaker who presides over its functions and the Senate by the Vice President who is the President of the Senate. In the absence of the Vice President, the Senate is presided over by a President Pro tempore. Senators are elected for nine year terms of office while members of the House of Representatives are elected for six year terms. They are eligible to succeed themselves if re-elected by their constituencies. These constituencies are based on electoral districts designated by population and political expediency. The Liberia electoral laws state that there will be two senators per county and a minimum of two representatives for counties with less than 10,000 inhabitants.

17. The Executive Branch of government is headed by the President. The President and vice President are elected for a six year term of office and are eligible to succeed themselves for only one term. The Executive is broken down into Ministries and Agencies of Government at the National level. These Ministries and agencies are headed by Ministers who assist the President and Vice President to run the affairs of state.

C. General legal framework

18. Liberia's Judiciary is headed by a Chief Justice and Associate Justices who administer the highest court of the land, the Supreme Court. The judiciary consists of other subordinate courts such as the circuit courts, criminal court, magisterial courts, juvenile courts, justice or the peace courts. The judiciary adjudicates all cases.

19. Administratively, the judicial system is headed by a Minister of Justice who is the Attorney General and Chairperson of the Joint security. The joint security comprises all security apparatuses in the country such as the ministries of defence, national security, the National Security Agency and the national Human rights Commission. The Joint Security ensures fair, equal and transparent treatment under the law.

20. The Ministry of Justice prosecutes all cases involving the government. The Minister of Justice supervises activities of the Liberian National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, the National Fire Service and the Correctional system inclusive of the prisoner's rehabilitation program. The Ministry and its subsidiary agencies enforce the Law, protect lives and properties and protect the human and civil rights of people within the territorial confines of Liberia.

D. The independent human rights commission

21. The Independent Human Rights Commission was created by the passage of an act in 2005. It is an independent entity charged with the responsibilities of ensuring protection of the human rights of citizens and foreigners in Liberia. It utilizes remedies of habeas corpus, writs of mandamus and prohibition. It also ensures the implementation of all international human rights instruments ratified by Liberia inclusive of the CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women. The ILO convention no. 187 on the worst forms of child labour was ratified within the reporting period.

E. Protection of human rights

22. To ensure increased promotion and protection of the rights of women, the Government has established human rights units within the Ministries of Justice and Gender and Development. The role of the human rights unit in the Ministry of Justice, MOJ, is to investigate human rights complaints, take appropriate measures and or recommend cases for prosecution, work with the judiciary and monitor the progress of cases through the criminal justice system. The unit also reports on the implementation of international human rights treaties and conventions involving Human rights. The Division of Human Rights within the Ministry of Gender and Development is responsible for ensuring the promotion, and protection of women and children's rights.

F. UNSCR 1325

23. Liberian women were actively engaged in the resolution of the civil war in Liberia. Since then, there has been the recognition of the positive contributions of women in peace keeping and security matters. Liberia is building the potential of women to serve in the security sector.

24. The Liberian National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 which covers the year 2009-2013 provides a framework to strengthen and develop protection, response and prevention policies, mechanisms, programs and procedures to guarantee security for women and girls personally and at the national level and promote their human rights. It also provides for developing economic, social and security policies to empower women and girls to participate fully and effectively in Liberia's peace building, reconstruction recovery and development processes at all levels, including decision making.

25. The Plan of Action also aims at strengthening the coordination and coherence of gender mainstreaming activities in Liberia on women peace and security. Specific actionable areas are protection, prevention, participation and empowerment and promotion.

G. Promotion and protection of children's rights

26. In 2010, 68 Child Welfare Committees (CWCs), comprising of 613 members were established in seven counties. These Committees help to monitor, investigate and report child rights abuses at the community level. 25 supervisors of the CWC and social workers were trained on child protection issues. These social workers and CWCs are to continue the training of the various CWCs in the seven counties. The Government of Liberia continues to involve all stakeholders in the protection of children. The involvement of children themselves is supported by the Children's Assemblies nationwide. These structures across the country have contributed towards advocating for the protection of children's rights.

27. The Ministry of Gender and Development also provides counselling and mediation services to address cases of non-persistent support. These services address issues of lack of support for children whose fathers neglect their paternal responsibilities to them.

28. The Children's Act was passed by the National Legislature in September, 2011 giving children the rights to maximum promotion, participation and protection of their rights. The underlying factor governing the Act is that the interest of the child is supreme. It cuts across children's right to education, health care, adequate food and water, shelter, clothing, expression and access to information, protection from harmful work, abuse and exploitation, and protection from involvement in armed conflict. It also spells out parental duties and rights regarding their children.

IV. State of the economy

29. Liberia's post-war economic growth was sustained in 2012, with estimated real gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 8.9%. 2012 registered the first exports in iron ore, increased construction, and strong performance in services. The GDP is projected to expand by 7.7% in 2013 and 5.4% in 2014, supported by further iron ore expansion and concession-related foreign direct investment (FDI). Liberia's economic outlook remains vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices, particularly for its key exports, rubber and iron ore. Potential declines in FDI, overseas development assistance, as well as potential conflicts from project affected populations could also affect economic performance. Consumer price inflation moderated to 6.9% in 2012, due to lower international food and fuel prices.

30. In December 2012, Liberia launched the Agenda for Transformation (AFT), its second poverty reduction strategy. The AFT intends to remove key infrastructure constraints in energy, roads, and ports, and to support youth and capacity building. The government has secured financing to rehabilitate the Mount Coffee Hydropower plant, which could become operational at end of 2015 to address the country's substantial energy shortage. The AFT is also intended to raise the economic status of Liberians to middle income level by 2030. This should reduce poverty significantly as 70% of Liberians now live on less than two dollars a day. (Agenda for Transformation, 2012). In July, 2013, the new Decent work bill pegged the minimum wage for domestic workers to U.S 6.75 daily or $180 monthly an increase of about 400%.

31. Natural resources continue to play a leading role in Liberia's economy. Iron ore, rubber, and timber dominate exports, and the oil and palm oil sectors offer

much potential. The management of these resources has come under scrutiny in the past year. The abuse of Private Use Permits in the forestry sector has resulted in a quarter of Liberia's land being contracted out to foreign companies with little oversight. Land access disputes have also slowed planting in the palm oil sector, and oil discoveries have been overshadowed by the need to reform the sector's institutions.

32. Investments in power and transportation should foster linkages between Liberia's private sector and its natural resources sector, while increasing productivity and market access for the majority of households in rural areas that are engaged in small-scale agriculture.

33. Concession agreements could create up to 100,000 local jobs over 10 years, but this will make limited impact on the 50,000 youth joining the labour force every year. Increased employment creation would help decrease the risk of instability. This is crucial as numerous concessions continue to face difficulties from local populations over their lack of involvement and informed prior consent for the awarding of these concessions by government.

The Ministry of Gender and Development

34. The Government of Liberia continues to promote policies, programs and enact legislations to ensure equality of women and men in society. The Ministry of Gender and Development instituted in 2001 is the national machinery for promoting gender equality, women's advancement and children's rights in Liberia. It advises the government of Liberia on all matters affecting women and Children as well as mainstream gender in Government's policies, programs, legislations and resource allocation.

35. The Ministry also monitors and reports back to Government the impact of national policies and programs on women and children in addition to recommending appropriate measures to be taken in mobilizing and integrating women as equal partners with men in social, political, economic and cultural development of Liberia.

36. Acting in consonance with the Constitution of Liberia which guarantees fundamental freedoms for all Liberians regardless of race, sex, creed, origin, tribal affiliation, the Government of Liberia's policies and programs reflect its commitment to gender equality and equity. This is evidenced in Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008-2011, Gender policy of Liberia, 2009, Gender policy of the Liberian National Police, Mental Health policy 2009, Agenda for Transformation, 2012 and the Vision 2030 national strategy.